

## Fay Weldon

Since the publication of her first novel in 1967, Fay Weldon has been one of the most popular writers dealing with women's liberation. She is known for her wicked wit, relentless critique of the patriarchy, and wonderfully flawed but indomitable women. The central question for Weldon is how to live in a world where contradiction and paradox reign, where there is no justice, and where imperfect women and men, trying to get along the best they can, usually make a muddle of things. A grim message. But Weldon's resilient protagonists never give up, and their struggles to construct their identities and to determine their own economic, sexual, and reproductive rights demand courage and tremendous sacrifice, and offer some hope for the evolution of humanity. Weldon's vision, in her own idiosyncratic, postmodern manner, is intensely moral. Our job, according to Sonia, the convicted arsonist and heroine of *In the Heart of the Country*, is "to be scavengers: to pick up the dregs and dust of creation and save what's possible and render it back to the Almighty, not to hang about carelessly, adding to the mud, the trouble and confusion" (14).

Weldon's work reflects very powerfully the early philosophy of the feminist movement, "the personal is political." Her fiction focuses primarily on the everyday lives of women, and political action often happens in kitchens, on playgrounds, at suburban dinner parties—wherever women spend their lives. It is also evident from several interviews Weldon has given that she draws heavily on her own life in creating her fictional world. She has, however, refused to clarify a number of conflicting or ambiguous biographical details. In answer to a query on the online Weldon discussion list Weldon said, "I am a writer of fiction; you cannot expect me to provide true or reliable information. You must learn what you can from the internal evidence of my novels or from websites, which indeed get everything wrong" ("Thank"). The following summary of Weldon's life, taken mainly from Lana Faulk's excellent critical analysis of her work, reflects the most current research.

Born Franklin Birkinshaw in Alvechurch, a village in Worcestershire, England, in 1931, Weldon emigrated with her family to New Zealand when she was around five-years-old. Weldon's parents divorced when she was still quite young, and the impact on her work can be seen in the recurring theme of men who abandon their wives and children. Weldon returned to England with her mother and sister when she was fourteen. For most of her life Weldon was raised in relative poverty and in a household of women—mother, sister, and grandmother—which profoundly influenced her writing. "I believed the world was female," Weldon has said (Faulk 1).